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SUBJECT Indira Gandhi

LEA THOMPSON: Joining us now live in our studio is Rodney Jones of the Georgetown Center for Strategic Studies. Mr. Jones is the Director of Nuclear Policy Studies and resident expert on India and the sub-continent. Also joining us is Diwan Prakash, a close family friend to the late Indira Gandhi, a former member of the Indian Air Force and an aide to Lord Mountbatten in the '40s where Prakash's relationship to Gandhi became professional as well as personal.

JIM VANCE: Gentlemen, welcome. Mr. Jones, I would like to begin with you. There probably are a number of people in this country who, aside from being saddened by the death of a leader, might be curious to know why they should care about what happens in India, of what importance is it to us here in the States.

RODNEY JONES: Well, it's very important to us to have a relationship with a country which has about 16 percent of the world's population and which, among the developing countries, is a democracy, one of the few true and genuine democracies in the developing world. Our concern about the fate of that country and the fate of its political system is truly important.

THOMPSON: Mr. Prakash, a personal but also, I guess, a political question as well, why did Mrs. Gandhi have Sikh guards guarding her? Why -- why did she take that chance? Do you know?

DIWAN PRKASH: You're asking me?

THOMPSON: Yes. Do you have any idea why she was willing to take that risk of having the very people who hated her the most be her guards?

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PRAKASH: I have really no idea at all, except probably it was a bureaucratic mixup or probably there was a deeper conspiracy. That will have to be gone into by the government of India.

VANCE: Mr. Prakash, you knew Mrs. Gandhi quite well and for some time. We knew her as a strong, tough, smart woman. I'm curious to know how she got to be that way. As I understand it, her father really never groomed her for her kind of power -- for the kind of power she acceded to.

PRAKASH: Yes, you're right. Mr. Nehru didn't groom her for taking over the prime ministry of India. He said India was a democracy and the people would elect whomever they wanted to elect to that post. She grew up in the shadow of a very big shady tree and she was a very mild, very fragile woman most of her life. And then when she took on the responsibilities of the prime ministership she suddenly grew into that job. And in my opinion and in the opinion of a lot of Indians, she was probably one of the best prime ministers India has had.

VANCE: Mr. Jones, if I may, Miss Gandhi apparently was determined to keep India together, to disallow an independent Punjab state. With her assassination now, do you have any idea what might develop along that front?

JONES: Well, it seems to me there's bound to be some continuing trouble that arises from the grievances that the Sikh community feels, and the political demands that they have been making over time. But I would have to add that I think there will also be some reason to hope that the violence that we have seen and the violence that produced the Indian government's crackdown, the use of the Army to first besiege and then shoot out the extremists from the Golden Temple, some reason to hope that that will not be the future course of the situation in the country.

THOMPSON: But Mr. Jones, indeed, her son has been put in place in the government. Is it really going to make any difference?

JONES: Well yes, I think so. I think that there's a sense in which Mrs. Gandhi's death may have a healing effect on many Sikhs and, indeed, ultimately on many other parts of the Indian community. If you like, I'd use the idea of atonement, that there's something that has happened now that takes away the damage that has been done in part and leads people to think about reconciliation and a healing process.

VANCE: Gentlemen, we thank you for sharing your time with us. Rodney Jones of the Georgetown Center for Strategic Studies, and Mr. Diwan Prakash, a very close family friend of the

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late Indira Gandhi. Thank you very much both of you.